

Notable quotations from Catholic social teaching on the theme of Work and Workers' Rights

Work remains a good thing, not only because it is useful and enjoyable, but also because it expresses and increases the worker's dignity. Through work we not only transform the world, we are transformed ourselves, becoming "more a human being."

On Human Work (Donders translation), #9

The obligation to earn one's bread presumes the right to do so. A society that denies this right cannot be justified, nor can it attain social peace.

The Hundredth Year (Donders translation), #43

Human work is the key to the solution ... of the whole "social question." To consider work is of decisive importance when trying to make life "more human."

On Human Work (Donders translation), #3

All work has a threefold moral significance. First, it is a principle way that people exercise the distinctive human capacity for self-expression and self-realization. Second, it is the ordinary way for human beings to fulfill their material needs. Finally, work enables people to contribute to the well-being of the larger community. Work is not only for one's self. It is for one's family, for the nation, and indeed for the benefit of the entire human family.

Economic Justice for All #97

Yet the workers' rights cannot be doomed to be the mere result of economic systems aimed at maximum profits. The thing that must shape the whole economy is respect for the workers' rights within each country and all through the world's economy.

On Human Work (Donders translation), #17

Created in God's image, we were given the mandate to transform the earth. By their work people share in God's creating activity....Awareness that our work is a sharing in God's work ought to permeate even the most ordinary daily activities.

By our labor we are unfolding the Creator's work and contributing to the realization of God's plan on earth. The Christian message does not stop us from building the world or make us neglect our fellow human beings. On the contrary it binds us more firmly to do just that.

On Human Work (Donders translation), #25

The varieties of crime are numerous: all offenses against life itself, such as murder, genocide, abortion, euthanasia and willful suicide; all violations of the integrity of the human person, such as mutilation, physical and mental torture, undue psychological pressures; all offenses against human dignity, such as subhuman living conditions, arbitrary imprisonment, deportation, slavery, prostitution, the selling of women and children, degrading working conditions where people are treated as mere tools for profit rather than free and responsible persons: all these and the like are criminal: they poison civilization; and they debase the perpetrators more than the victims and militate against the honor of the creator.

The Church in the Modern World #27

The Church fully supports the right of workers to form unions or other associations to secure their rights to fair wages and working conditions. This is a specific application of the more general right to associate. In the words of Pope John Paul II, "The experience of history teaches that organizations of this type are an indispensable element of social life, especially in modern industrial societies."

Economic Justice for All #104

Workers not only want fair pay, they also want to share in the responsibility and creativity of the very work process. They want to feel that they are working for themselves -- an awareness that is smothered in a bureaucratic system where they only feel themselves to be "cogs" in a huge machine moved from above.

On Human Work (Donders translation), #15

We consider it our duty to reaffirm that the remuneration of work is not something that can be left to the laws of the marketplace; nor should it be a decision left to the will of the more powerful. It must be determined in accordance with justice and equity; which means that workers must be paid a wage which allows them to live a truly human life and to fulfill their family obligations in a worthy manner.

Other factors too enter into the assessment of a just wage: namely, the effective contribution which each individual makes to the economic effort, the financial state of the company for which he works, the requirements of the general good of the particular country ... and finally the requirements of the common good of the universal family of nations....

Mother and Teacher #71

For when people work, they not only alter things and society, they develop themselves as well. They learn much, they cultivate their resources, they go outside of themselves and beyond themselves. Rightly understood, this kind of growth is of greater value than any external riches which can be garnered. People are more precious for what they are than for what they have. Similarly, all that people do to obtain greater justice, wider brotherhood, a more humane ordering of social relationships has greater worth than technical advances. For these advances can supply the material for human progress, but of themselves alone they can never actually bring it about.

The Church in the Modern World, #35

As the Church solemnly reaffirmed in the recent Council, "the beginning, the subject and the goal of all social institutions is and must be the human person." All people have the right to work, to a chance to develop their qualities and their personalities in the exercise of their professions, to equitable remuneration which will enable them and their families "to lead a worthy life on

the material, social, cultural and spiritual level" and to assistance in case of need arising from sickness or age.

A Call to Action #14

Experience suggests many ways in which the demands of justice can be satisfied. Not to mention other ways, it is especially desirable today that workers gradually come to share in the ownership of their company, by ways and in the manner that seem most suitable. For today, even more than in the time of Our Predecessor, "every effort must be made that at least in future a just share only of the fruits of production be permitted to accumulate in the hands of the wealthy, and that an ample sufficiency be supplied to the workers."

Mother and Teacher #77

It is in their daily work...that persons become the subjects and creators of the economic life of the nation. Thus, it is primarily through their daily labor that people make their most important contributions to economic justice.

Economic Justice for All #96

Yet the workers' rights cannot be doomed to be the mere result of economic systems aimed at maximum profits. The thing that must shape the whole economy is respect for the workers' rights within each country and all through the world's economy.

On Human Work (Donders translation), #17

We must pay more attention to the one who works than to what the worker does. The self-realization of the human person is the measure of what is right and wrong.

On Human Work (Donders translation), #6

Work is in the first place "for the worker" and not the worker "for work." Work itself can have greater or lesser objective value, but all work should be judged by the measure of dignity given to the person who carries it out.

On Human Work (Donders translation), #6

We must consequently continue to study the situation of the worker. There is a need for solidarity movements among and with the workers. The church is firmly committed to this cause, in fidelity to Christ, and to be truly the "church of the poor."

On Human Work (Donders translation), #8

The government should make similarly effective efforts to see that those who are able to work can find employment in keeping with their aptitudes, and that each worker receives a wage in keeping with the laws of justice and equity. It should be equally the concern of civil authorities to ensure that workers be allowed their proper responsibility in the work undertaken in industrial organization, and to facilitate the establishment of intermediate groups which will make social life richer and more effective.

Peace on Earth #64

In the first place, the worker must be paid a wage sufficient to support him and his family.

The Fortieth Year #71

Work is a duty, because our Creator demanded it and because it maintains and develops our humanity. We must work out of regard for others, especially our own families, but also because of the society we belong to and in fact because of the whole of humanity.

On Human Work (Donders translation), #16

Consequently, if the organization and structure of economic life be such that the human dignity of workers is compromised, or their sense of responsibility is weakened, or their freedom of action is removed, then we judge such an economic order to be unjust, even though it produces a vast amount of goods, whose distribution conforms to the norms of justice and equity.

Mother and Teacher #83

We inherit the work of the generations before us, and we share in the building of the future of all those who will come after us. All this should be kept in mind when considering the rights that come with work or the duty to work.

On Human Work (Donders translation), #16

Humans are the image of God partly through the In our time, the role of human work is becoming increasingly important as the productive factor both of nonmaterial and of material wealth. Moreover, it is becoming clearer how a person's work is naturally interrelated with the work of others. More than ever, work is work with others and work for others: it is a matter of doing something for someone else. Work becomes ever more fruitful and productive to the extent that people become more knowledgeable of the productive potentialities of the earth and more profoundly cognizant of the needs of those for whom their work is done.

Centesimus Annus #31